The Mystery of Hamlet (4)

Toshio Maeda

(3) Approach to Hamlet through Imagery

3. A Bare Bodkin and the Mobled Queen
The Clothes Imagery

Claudius: "A king of shreds and patches"

The clothes pattern evolves round Claudius' rationalism. It comments on the moral problem of intellect united with evil which is characteristic of Shakespeare's villains such as Iago, Edmund, Regan and Goneril. Claudius dresses his plots up in a quasi-logical form. Claudius is the victim of dialectic like Raskolnikov. He justifies his desire or the thing done in his wedding with the Queen:

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe,
> Yet so far hath *discretion* fought with *nature.*
> That we with *wisest sorrow* think on him
> Together with *remembrance of ourselves.* (I. ii, 1–7)

A logical form pervades this argument of Claudius. The careful contrast between two opposite notions makes us feel logical acrobatic balancing. 'Discretion' is opposed to 'nature', 'wisest sorrow' to 'remembrances of ourselves'. His speech is decorated with fine rhetoric, and what he wants to state is only that if a king dies, another must take his place and the whole court must accept what seems inevitable.

> Therefore our sometime a sister, now our queen,
> The imperial jointress to this warlike state,
> Have we, as 't were with a defeated joy,
> With an auspicious and a dropping eye,

With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
Taken to wife ; (I. ii, 8–13)

From the first premise he goes a logical path step by step to reach the conclusion; from '*though*' and '*yet*' to '*therefore*'. And there also exist some pairs of ideas contradicting each other;[1] '*an auspicious eye*' against '*a dropping eye*', and '*mirth in funeral*' against '*dirge in marriage*', and finally '*delight*' against 'dole'. If we reflect a little, we shall find that this is not a true voice of a man who has experienced stern reality. If a man is awe-struck with reality, he will never explain away what he has felt deeply. "A man of vulgar logic will explain all, account for all, or believe nothing of it," says Carlyle. Being a man of logic, Claudius analyses, defines, arranges according to cause and effect, and explains away until, like an Arithmetician, he weighs pleasure and pain on equal scale.

Heilman speaks of Regan and Goneril, saying "Reason is *ad hoc* argument, justification for desire."[2] Claudius, too, is a practical reasoner like Regan and Goneril, and imagines himself to be fortified against all oppositions, if he can dress up his desires with rational explanation. As if he were reminding Laertes of reason being an implement of attining his desire, Claudius answers to him as he asks the King to grant permission to leave for France:

You can not speak of *Reason* to the Dane
And lose your voice. (I. ii, 44–5)

Claudius reasons that he can be Hamlet's father by calling him "my cousin Hamlet ,and *my son*", which draws to the speaker an satirical answer from Hamlet: "I am too much in the sun." Convinced that he can rationalize 'death', he reproaches Hamlet for his irrational feeling.

But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation, for some term. (I. ii, 89–92)

From Claudius' logical point of view, death is not a shattering, but a common thing, and the bereaved are required to wear black suit only for social form's sake. A father's death binds his only son in 'filial obligation'. Hence he regards as unnecessary and unreasonable Hamlet's grief which springs naturally from the inmost heart of filial

affection. Reason regards grief as 'To reason most absurd.'

> Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,
> A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
> To reason most absurd, ... (I. ii, 101–103)

Reason plasters desire or the thing done with 'painted word' as Claudius himself says. Claudius has something in common with Edmund in justification for what is done, and with Iago in rationaligation of desire: after Edmund has plotted the death of Lear and Cordelia, he says that he locked Lear up lest the old king should arouse the public against them, and he adds, "With him I sent the queen! My *reason* all the same....." (V. iii, 51–52). Iago is doubtful of the rumour about Othello and Emilia. He says, "I know not if 't be true," but he wants to act on 'mere suspicion', as if it were 'a surety'. Reason serves his own passions instead of ascertaining the truth.

> I know not if 't be true.
> But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
> Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
> The better shall my purpose work on him.
> Cassio's a proper man, let me see now:
> To get his place; and to plume up my will
> In double knavery. (Othello, I. iii, 394–400)

Claudius kills his brother in order to attain his two objects—to take over his place and to take the Queen to wife. When Laertes storms the palace and threatens the King, Claudius turns the avenger's fury against him to Hamlet. Claudius plumes up his will in double knavery like Iago. But there is a diffierence between them. Claudius is conscious of his own ugliness, while Iago is indifferent to his own flaw. When he hears Polonius referring to 'devotion's visage and pious action' with which the devil himself is sugar'd over, he is conscience-stricken:

> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
> The harlot's cheek, beautied with *plastering* art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most *painted word.* (III. i, 150–53)

'Painted' means 'plausible, specious (=making a good appearance)' according to Webster.

'Plaster' means 'cover with plaster'. He dresses up his passion and plot in a quasi-logical form which is elusive like plaster. The sharp mind is an instrument to attain its irrational objective with. But the reasoner, as Heilman says, is "not immune to the nonrational."[3] Claudius has no moral or religious values by means of which his passion can be disciplined. His mind has a cool control of the situation, but he can not reject his passion as destructive to his interest. He falls a prey to passions.

His love for the Queen stirs him to kill his brother. When the secret is disclosed by Hamlet, the King plots the death of him for his safety and love for the Queen and is eventually destroyed by the passion his mind serves, as Goneril poisons Regan for the attainment of Edmund, and their partnership collapses. Grebanier rightly lays an emphasis on Claudius' materialistic nature: "Claudius, for all his ability, if not debased and ignoble, is not, however, a noble character. The root of his criminality seems to be a completely materialistic nature, rarely touched by spiritual values.... He has thirst for the power and riches of this life, and has been undeterred by principle in achieving them in the directest way possible."[4]

The King is infatuated with the Queen and the Queen is too indulgent in her son. The King, therefore, "suppresses his growing hatred of Hamlet so that she need not be torn between her love for both of them."[5] The text stands its proof. When Claudius tells Laertes that Hamlet has his (Laertes') 'noble father slain' and pursued his (the King's) life, the younger man asks him why he has not taken measure against his stepson. The King's answer to this question consists of two reasons. One reason is that the Queen can not live without Hamlet, and the King can not live without the Queen. Bradley does not doubt the genuineness of Claudius' love for her.[6] Another one is that Claudius fears the great love which the general gender bear him.

> O! for two special reasons;
> Which may to you, perhaps, seem much unsinew'd;
> But yet to me they are strong. The Queen his mother
> Lives by his looks, and for myself, ——
> My virtue or my plague, be it either which, ——
> She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
> That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
> I could not but by her. The other motive
> Why to a public count I might not go,
> Is the great love the general gender bear him:
> Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
> Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
> Convert his gyves to graces; (IV. vii, 9-21)

Besides Claudius' confession of love for the Queen, we can find the proof in his un-

conscious actions. Any reader will notice that throughout the whole play does Claudius never speak slightingly of Hamlet to the Queen. Hamlet, however, is never tired of throwing bitter invectives at Claudius. Claudius makes an effort to repress his hatred, and biting his lips, he replies to Hamlet very politely. There is no doubt that he pretends to be unaffected with forced patience only because he is anxious to spare the Queen any hurt. In his prayer to God he confessed this motive of his guilt.

> since I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
> (III. iii, 53–55)

Before God man stands naked, stripped of all his clothes of pretence. We can rightly interpret his words literally.

Once it is revealed to Claudius by the mouse-trap that Hamlet is privy to his secret murder, he is quick to plan to remove him. He has so far persevered in trying to live on good terms with Hamlet, for if the prince is willing to be agreeable with him, life will be pleasant enough to satisfy his lust. But now Hamlet has clearly become an obstacle to his desire. The rational form which he has assumed can not be put on any longer, but is laid bare by the rising passion. Reason can not control the non-rational, for passion can be guided only by divine love. Having no moral inspiration, Claudius can not have his passion disciplined. Hence his simulated kindness is taken off and his real nature leaps up from beneath the seeming.

Hamlet must rip off the layer of the King's seeming in order to ascertain his identity. But Claudius clings to his mask for his life. Let us see how Claudius reacts to Hamlet's mouse-trap. We expect Claudius, seeing the similarity of the little play to his guilty deed, instantly rise and scream and rush from the room. But Claudius never does. He will not unmask himself so easily. When the dumb show begins, Claudius watches with as much indifference as he would observe any other play. The show of love between the Player King and Player Queen has nothing to disturb him. Only in the middle of the dumb show there happens something that starts Claudius. It is at a time when the Poisoner enters and pours the poison in the King's ears that Claudius turns pale. "Quickly Hamlet looks about him—Gertrude and the courtiers are calmly observing the play; next he glances quickly at Hamlet—who, all as quick, is pretending to be elaborately absorbed in the performance."[7] Claudius makes sure that any one knows his crime. He takes refuge in the armour of unaffectedness and silence. He has only to master himself and keep his disguise worn tightly until the play is over.

As the performance of the "Murder of Gonzago" proceeds, Hamlet realizes that Claudius will never strip himself of his seeming. The King is a strong character. He is clinging to the sides of his throne to calm himself. Unless he makes the King break

silence, Hamlet is sure Claudius will not break. Hamlet addresses himself to the Queen:

Madam, how like you this play?

She replies unconcernedly:

The lady protests too much, methinks.

Hearing this dialogue, Claudius is more unnerved. Having been so far overstrained, he can not stand the tension any longer. His anxiety reaches the climax and his inner being leaps off its covering:

Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in 't?

Hamlet's arrow has hit the aim—the King's bosom. Hamlet's second shaft flies:

No, no! They do but jest, poison in jest; no offence is th' world!

Now Claudius is certain that Hamlet has found out his secret. He is beginning to losing his grip of his reason. As his alarm is increased by Hamlet's further figure of speech, the Poisoner enters. This is what Hamlet has been waiting for. He bids the actor begin his speech. When the Poisoner pours the venom into the Player King's ears, Claudius can not bear it any longer, and begins to break. Confounded, he rises to his feet, Hamlet has succeeded in divesting Claudius of the impenetrable hide. This is why Hamlet refers to the King's seeming, asking Horatio to fix his eyes on it:

Give him needful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgements join
In censure of his seeming. (III. ii, 86-89)

The reasoner 'assumes a pleasing shape' and plays a pleasing role. He is covered with all 'shreds and patches' that he can pick up.

Hamlet's criticism 'a king of shreds and patches' is symbolical of Claudius' identity.

——meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.
(I. v, 107–8)

Reason allied with evil is characteristic of Shakespeare's villains.[8] Like Iago Claudius dresses up his desire in rational form. The Ghost desires that our attention will be directed at the King's beastly rationalism :

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts—
O wiched wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! —— won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
(I. v, 42–46)

Kittredge admits Claudius intellectually to as high a rank as Hamlet : " King Claudius is a superb figure—almost as great a dramatic creation as Hamlet himself. His intellectual powers are of the highest order. He is eloquent ... always and everywhere a model of royal dignity. His courage is manifested .... His self-control ... is nothing less than marvellous. It was no accident that Shakespeare gave him that phrase which has become the ultimate pronouncement of the divine right of monarchy : 'Such divinity doth hedge a king.' "[9] But Kittredge goes too far. We should rather place him among wicked wits such as Iago, Edmund, Goneril and Regan. Let us compare Claudius with Iago and Edmund.

Edmund. Let me, if not by birth, have lands by *wit.*
All's meet that I can *fashion* fit. (King Lear, I. ii, 205–6)

Iago. Thou know'st we work by *wit* and not by witchcraft.
And *wit* depends on dilatory time. (Othello, II. iii, 381–2)

... do you find some occasion to anger Cassis, ..., or
from what other course you please, which the *time*
shall more favourably minister. (II. i, 275–9)

The words of the two villains' are reminiscent of those of Claudius'.

> Claudius. *Weigh* what convenience both of *time* and *means*
> May fit us to our *shape*. (IV. vii, 149–50)

Claudius says, "... I know love is begun by time." (IV. vii, 111) In Shakespeare 'time' often means 'circumstance' as well as the proper sense, as D. Wilson and Grebanier have pointed out. E.g.,

> The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness
> And time to speak it in. *Tempest*, II. i, 137–8;
> O time most accurst,
> 'Mongst all foes that a friend should be the worst!
> *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V. iv, 7–2.

A spirit of calculation depends on the circumstance, in cooperation with which it forges tricks and occasion. In Iago's words, reason is "a finder of occascons, that has an eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages, though true advantage never present" (II. i, 47–50). Wit does not believe in a miracle as witchcraft (love) does. Claudius' mind as well as Iago exercises a cool control of the situation for the attainment of the object of his desire. "The detached mind is an instrument of observation and analysis."[10] A practical reasoner takes advantage of any occasion and fashions his plot to a shape fit for deception. Iago works out some occasion to anger Cassis "from what other course you please, which the *time* shall favourably minister" (II. i, 279) and Claudius embellishes his malicious trick with a shape (costume) of fair play wherein he intends to kill Hamlet with Laertes' poisoned poinard, weighing "what conveniences both of time and means may fit us to our *shape*," as Iago planned to "*plume* up my will in double knavery" (I. iii, 399). One of Claudius' favourite phrases is 'shape'.

> So far he topped my thought
> That I, in forgery of *shapes* and tricks,
> Come short of what he did. (IV. vii, 88–90)

We should rememler Mr. Mack's "A shape may also be a disguise—even, in Shakespeare's time, an actor's costume or an actor's role."[11] A shape is closely related to 'play', 'act' and 'show'. He makes an actor not only of himself, but also of others, whom

he makes serve his purpose.

Laertes threatens Claudius on account of Polonius' death. But the King quickly soothes him with an admirable witchcraft and shapes him into a player to suit his purpose:

> What would you undertake
> To *show yourself in deed* your father's son
> More than *in words*? (IV. vii, 124–6)

Laertes is juggled to play the role of a revenger in the King's 'performance', as Claudius says. The King plots with Laertes to challenge Hamlet to a *fair play* of a fencing match. He clothes his wicked deed in a shape of a fair play, and is, therefore, afraid that his 'purposed evil' shows through the 'shreds and patches' of his performance:

> If this should fail,
> And that our drift *look through* our bad *performance*,
> 'Twere better not assayed. (IV. vii, 150–152)

Here clothes imagery is combined with play imagery, and Claudius' play is dressed up in his pleasing shape.

Not only Claudius, but other characters call this fencing-match a *play* or an act. To Hamlet a Lord delivers a message from the King, asking if Hamlet will accept a match at once or not:

> ... He sends to know if your pleasure hold to *play*
> with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.
> (V. ii, 205–6)

> The Queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment
> to Laertes before you fall to *play*. (V. ii, 216)

Hamlet accepts this challenge as a *play*. When the King offers the poisoned drink to Hamlet, he brushes it aside, saying, "I'll play this bout first." Early in the play Hamlet smells 'foul play' in the death of his father:

My father's spirit in arms! All is not well;
I doubt some *foul play.* (I. ii, 255–6)

As Claudius' device of murdering King Hamlet is a foul play, so is his plot on Prince Hamlet's life a fair play. If we take these things into account, we shall see what Shakespeare had in mind, when he had these characters regard as a play a fencing-match prepared by the King.

Pretence or appearence prevails in the world of surface. The victims of Claudius' rationalism are the shallow-minded. Gertrude is a woman of shallow emotions. Laertes is a man of ostentation whose bravery of his grief' put Hamlet into 'a towering passion.' Claudius' knavery operates on such people of appearance. But it loses its power before Reality. Reality cannot be approached with formal rationality. This is why Claudius cannot deceive God and Hamlet.

Claudius tries to approach God by pretending to be a contrite sinner.

But O, what *form* of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That can not be; since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain the offence?
(III. iii, 51–6)

Pretended prayer is a form and may be a philosophy, for it consists of logical words, but has not a thought. Pretended prayer is a mere repetition of empty 'painted words' as Claudius himself says, which can not bring one into an intimate intercourse with God. Auguste Sebatier, French theologian says, "Religion is an intercourse, a conscious and voluntary relation, entered into by a soul in distress with the mysterious power upon which it feels itself to depend, and upon which its fate is contingent. This intercouse with God is realized by prayer. Prayer is religion in act, that is, prayer is true religion. It is prayer that distinguishes the religious phenomenon from such similar or neighboring phenomena as purely moral or aesthetic sentiment. Religion is nothing if it be not the vital act by which the entire mind seeks to save itself by clinging to the principle from which it draws its life. This act is prayer, by which term I understand *no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae,* but the *very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence,*—it may be even before it has a name by which to call it. Wherever this interior prayer is lacking, there is no religion; wherever, on the other hand, this prayer rises and stirs the soul, even in the absence of forms or of doctrines,

we have living religion."[12]

"To Ficino, following a Neoplatonic conception, prayer is nothing but an inner conversion of the Soul towards God. Prayer is heard when the Soul becomes unified with God and so participates in His activity."[13] Prayer is a spiritual or inner intercourse of the Soul with God, and not a formal or outward action. When he realizes that the formal prayer is not heard by God, Claudius wrongly seeks for the reason in his formal actions :

> since I am still possessed
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,
> My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.

But the essence of faith lies in trust in God's grace, not in man's works. According to Ernest Best, "faith is not an attitude on man's part which forces God to right wrong but it is an acceptance of what God does through the death of Jesus in *righting wrong*."[14] Paul says, "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Romans 1 : 17) (Ho de dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai). Any one can not justified by his own actions, but only by his faith. Any one who could achieve his own justification through his human effort would breed egocentricity and pride. "A man's achievement in being good (keeping the law) would breed *pride*. Faith which is reliance on God leaves to God what we can not do for ourselves (justify ourselves) and excludes *pride*."[15] Paul lays stress on a clear distinction between faith and law :

> If Abraham was justified by anything he had done, then he has a ground for pride. But he has no such ground before God ; for what does Scripture say ? 'Abraham put his faith in God, and that faith was counted to him as righteousness' (Romans 4.2–4).

Edgar in *King Lear* says, "the clearest Gods, who make them honors / Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee." (IV. vi, 73–4). The material-minded Claudius tries to buy the spiritual salvation by means of dialectic which is his favourite weapon. Claudius is wrongly convinced that he will be justified by his own action. This is nothing but rational self-justification. Claudius is a rationalist who lives by wit and relies only on word and deed.

If we compare Claudius' attitude towards God with David's one, we shall see a great distinction between a reasoner and a believer. David commits the same guilt as Claudius. He commits an adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and later kills her husband lest his sin should be revealed to Uriah. His sin hangs heavy over his soul.

He suffers a painful remorse, as he is trying to conceal his crime from God. But at last Nathan's reproach drives David to beg for mercy to God. In Psalm 51 we hear David's contrite heart pulse with groaning blood.

> Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression.
> 2. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
> 3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.
> 4. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.
>
> — — —
>
> 7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
>
> — — —
>
> 10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
>
> — — —
>
> 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.

Here we see a sinner pouring out his soul before the Eternal. David stands naked in prayer, shorn of his royal scepter, dignity and pride. Though like Claudius he is possessed of Bathsheba and stained with guilty blood, he leaves to God's mercy himself as he is full of iniquity. As David himself says, God does not demand from man 'sacrifice' or 'burnt offering' but 'a broken and a contrite heart'—a free will to return to Him. David flies to the Divine Mercy as if it were 'his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble', while Claudius approaches to God with formal rites and logical words. "Faith is not emotional feeling or intellectual acceptance, but active response to a person, God; it is trust. Faith in a person creates the relationship in which it is easy to accept his guidance, and so to obey him. It is difficult to obey someone you do not trust."[16]

Claudius is extremely opposed to David and Paul in the attitude towards God. His rationalism naturally comes to the conclusion that expiation of man's sins can be attained by his own deeds (of the law). Charlotte Ehrl also notices his spirit of calculation and logical thinking in the prayer-scene:

> In der Gebets-szene äussert sich die Erregung in der Häufung von rhetorischen Fragen, Apostrophen und Ausrufen, während in der Beibehaltung des logischen Gedankengangs, der Kasuistik, dem antithetischen Abwägen von Für und

Wider, z. T. in der Form der Anominatio, der rechnende Sinn, das rationale Denken zu Wort kommen.[17]

According to Augustine, the origin of sin is ascribed to a bad will, rooted in a bad love. This bad will is defined as the 'will to power' by him. "The soul, loving its own power, relapses from the desire for a common and universal good to one which is individual and private."[18] Charles Norris Cochrane explains this 'bad will' as follows: "As such, it gives rise to phenomena such as a passion to explore the secrets of nature (Faustian *curiositas*) or a thirst for domination over one's fellow men (*tumidus fastus*) or, simply, the filthy whirl of sensual pleasure (caenosus gurges carnalis voluptatis), but whatever its particular manifestations, it involves the subordination of spiritual to material goods, i.e. to some form of what he calls the *cupiditas mundi*. It may thus be traced, in the first instance, to pride (*superbia*), the desire 'to try out power' and so 'to become like Gods': otherwise, to the pursuit of an ideal of self-sufficiency, in utter disregard for the fact that human nature has not received the capacity to achieve felicity without acknwoledging its dependence upon the principle of its life and being."[19]

This excellent deseription of human nature applies itself to Clandius. We do not feel God's grace until we 'stand naked before God and has been wholly poverished that he may procure the one pearl of great price.'[20] The overdressed Claudius cannot divest himself naked, and deplores the wretched state of his soul:

> O limed soul, that struggling to be free
> Art more engaged! Help, angels! make assay;
> Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel
> Be soft as sinews of the *new-born baby*.
> (III. ii, 68–71)

The word *new-born baby* is associated with an image of nakedness. In *Macbeth* 'pity' is likened to a *naked new-born baby*.'

> And pity, like naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind. (I. vii, 21–25)

'Nakedness' means 'unprotectedness'. The naked baby is the symbol of weakness. But 'the symbol of weakness begins to turn into a symbol of strength; for the babe, though new-born, is pictured as "Striding the blast" like an elemental force—like

" heaven's cherubim, hors'd / Upon the sightless couriers of the air." '[21]

Only nakedness can destroy the rationalism on which Claudius wagers his fortune. " Nakedness may be an aid to understanding."[22] The overdressed Claudius is destined to blind himself to the invisible Reality :

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below :
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
> (III. iii, 97–8)

' Words without thought ' is equivalent to ' painted word ' or 'the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart.' In this prayer-scene Claudius suffers the conflict between an impulse to put on and one to strip : We see the contrast between clothes imagery and nakedness one in this scene :

> What if this *curs'd hand*
> Were *thicker* than itself *with brother's blood*,
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To *wash it white as snow* ? (43–6)

' cursed hand ... thicker '... with brother's blood ' is a clothing image and ' wash it white as snow ' is a nakedness one.

> In the corrupted currents of this world
> *Offense's gilded hand* may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
> There is no shuffling ; there the *action* lies
> In his *true nature*, and we ourselves compelled,
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
> To give in evidence. (57–64)

This conscious contrast between the two opposite images enables us to conclude that Shakespeare was much worried about clothes phrases. This theme is taken up again and developed in *King Lear* :

> Through *tatter'd clothes* great vices do appear ;
> *Robes* and *furr'd gowns* hide all. *Plate* sin with *gold*,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
(IV. vi, 168–71)

Claudius' gilded hand or painted word can not deceive God. But there is another whom Claudius must fear. It is he, Hamlet the Dane. As we shall see in the following article Claudius can somehow manage the Hamlet who made an attempt to attain his purpose through his own effort. However, now that Having stripped himself of his own will, Hamlet makes of himself an instrument of the divine will and lets divine inspiration move him, Claudius can no longer defend himself against Hamlet's *naked* sword. When supported by his own purpose, Hamlet's strong lance of justice hurtless breaks, but when stirred by the divine spirit, Hamlet's straw does pierce the king's gold-plated sin. Claudius' exploit "ripe in device" is baffled by "a divinity which shapes our ends."

"It is notable in Shakespearean tragedy how much the villain works by fortuitous circumstance on which he must improve, rather than by a premeditated rational plan."[23] Hamlet's killing of Polonius gives Claudius a favourable chance. On the spur of the moment he forms a plan to banish Hamlet abroad, where the Prince is to be put to death by England's sovereign. When Laertes assaults the King because of the murder of Polonius, Claudius hits on an idea of making an instrument of the young man to despatch Hamlet and succeeds in trapping him by praising his skill with the rapier and shapes a plot on Hamlet's life into an "accident", "Under which he shall not choose but fall" (IV. vii, 68, 65).

Nowhere does Claudius defend himself more artfully and elusively with words than in Act IV, Scene V, where Laertes storms the palace with a rabble and threatens him because of Polonius' death. Nowhere does Claudius give another a shape more exquisitely than in this scene. He diverts Laertes' raging anger unto Hamlet so that he may play a role to the King's theatrical effects. Laertes begins by asking threateningly, "O thou vile king, / Give me my father." (IV. v, 116–7). As he knows it is useless to reason with an angry man, Claudius overawes Laertes by asserting divine sanction:

There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will. (IV. v, 124–6)

Claudius takes refuge in or arms himself with anointed kingship. An angry arm should not be lifted up against a heavenly minister. Laertes, however, casts an invective against the divine hedge of a king:

To hell allegiance, vows to the blackest devil,

Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. (IV. v, 131–3)

But the King does not try to restrain him, but allows him to give vent to his rage. When Laertes says, "Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged / Most throughly for my father," Claudius baffles him by assent: Who shall stay you? (136) We can not fight with a foe who will not dispute with us. Claudius then proceeds with his appeasing questions:

Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father, is't writ in your revenge
That swoopstake you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser? (IV. v, 134–43)

There is only one logical answer to this question: Laertes' "None but his enemies" (44). The King then marches to the consequent question triumphantly: "Will you know them then?" (144). Now he has turned "A very noble youth" (V. i, 226), as Hamlet says, into a villain who is to act on his stage of murder.

By the time Act IV, Scene vii opens, Laertes is Claudius' friend. The transformation of Laertes is more remarkable than that of Othello by Iago, who also appeals to 'Divinity of hell' and reason. Claudis as well as Iago has a capacity for getting others to see things his way and to have the illusion that they are seeing well, though they are actually deceived by the seeming. The evidence is seen in a change of Laertes from 'To hell allegiance, vows to the blackest devil, / Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!', which proves inimical to Claudius, to "I'll *anoint* my sword," which shows that he is under the illusion that his vengeance is sanctified by God and God's deputy 'the deputy elected by the Lord.'

To Laertes is Claudius a God. As Hamlet is managed by God, so is Laertes by the King. Claudius puts on a role of God and makes a scourge of Laertes, as does God of Hamlet. "Claudius has made himself the god of his universe. This he indicates throughout the play by his celebration of his own power with trumpets, drums and cannons:

But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder" (I. ii. 126–8)

He makes reason serve his desires and turns his feeling into the actions. He tries to

outwit ' a divinity that shapes our ends ' to be involved in his trap. When Claudius' treachery is unfolded, Hamlet stabs the King with the poisoned sword. The King's final words " O, yet defend me, friends, I am but hurt." is symbolical of Claudius. Who can only defend himself with logical, ' most painted word ' or ' an embellished, rhetorical style '[24] clings to the outer surface or covering even at his death. Protectedness or overdressedness by wordliness is the way to spiritual loss, while " deprivation is often the way to gain."[25] Claudius is caught by death in the ' act which has no relish of salvation in't ' ' that his soul may be as damnel and black / As hell, whereto it goes.' Untimely death comes to Shakespeare's villains and strips them of their souls and sends down them to hell.[26] Claudius is not spiritually prepared for death: " O yet defend me, friends; I am but hurt."

He explained earlier that his reason for not quickly dispatching Hamlet is that " my arrows, / Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind, / Would have reverted to my bow again, / And not where I had aimed them" (IV. vii, 21-4). But this is true of 'all contriving ' (IV. vii, 135) of his as he says of Hamlet:

> my arrows *of plots*,
> To slightly timbered for so loud a wind (*Spirit*) *of heavens*
> Would have reverted to my bow *of wit*
> And not where I had aimed them. (IV. vii. 21-4)

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